Niche Work If You Can Get It

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Episode 4 - Rap Interpreters

Presenter: Nick Baker

Contributors:
Daryl Jackson
Marie Pascall
Louise Tingay
Loyle Carner
Mark Mayer
Kate Labno
A Fan

TRANSCRIPT STARTS:

[Music]

Nick Baker: Now, this niche work kind of came looking for me. I’m not that big a rap fan and prior to a date at WOMAD Festival 2017, I would have been puzzled at the suggestion that hearing-impaired people could enjoy rap. Anyway, at WOMAD I am persuaded against my will, I have to say, to see a young British rapper and just as I’m happily surrendering my will to the music and to poetry of Loyle Carner, my eyes wander stage left which is where I first spot Louise Tingay, every bit as much as a performer as Loyle, interpreting intensely in British sign language but somehow simultaneous swaying serenely to his beats. It’s niche at first sight but bloomin’ heck it looks difficult.

Daryl Jackson is a performer and British sign language consultant with an organisation called Performance Interpreting. His main job is to mentor interpreters who are going out to work at gigs.
He’s deaf himself and he’s going to go through one line, just a single line of a Loyle Carner tune and I’m going to learn to interpret it.

It’s from a track called Florence, a very sweet song about Loyle Carner imagining for his mum the daughter she never had and a sister he never had. Verbally it’s really complicated.

[Music]

“She could be my little freckled-face fidgeter, me but miniature, sleeping on the sofa till she tackles…”

Nick Baker: “She could be my little freckled-face fidgeter”.

Daryl Jackson: So we’ve got “she could be”. “She could be…”

Nick Baker: Marie Pascall, director of Performance Interpreting is overseeing my effort and is quick to remind me that one lesson won’t even scratch the surface.

Marie Pascall: Just to become an interpreter it takes seven to ten years to achieve that qualification. For performance interpreting, the majority of our interpreters are post-six years qualification and that’s because you need performance skills and qualifications and experience as well as generic interpreting. So when we provide a performance interpretation, it’s not just the lyrics we are interpreting, it’s the artists and the music. We have to reflect the artist’s persona, their attitude, the intent of the piece, the emotion. So we are not interpreting a performance; we are performing an interpretation.

Nick Baker: Okay. Put it all together for me, Daryl.

Daryl Jackson: Okay. So....

Nick Baker: Okay. I got it. That was pretty fast. Okay.

Daryl Jackson: Yes, yes.

Nick Baker: How’s that?

Daryl Jackson: Yes.

Nick Baker: Have I got the job?

Daryl Jackson: Yes.

[Laughter]

Marie Pascall: Very impressed but I think you might need a little bit more work with your body language. If you look at rappers on the stage you don’t have to have the music to know they are a rapper.

Nick Baker: With those huge trousers and...

Marie Pascall: Yes.

Nick Baker: It’s not me though that.

Nick Baker: Well if not me then who? Marie says there are only a dozen interpreters in the UK who can actually do rap and one of them is in Bristol. This is Louise Tingay on interpreting for Loyle Carner.
Louise Tingay: We are trained to best reflect the artist in a way that shows their spirit, so that’s what I hope that I would do and he’s... I just wanted to reflect his youth, his exuberance, his obvious delight in performing to people.

Nick Baker: And we are going to meet him, aren’t we?

Louise Tingay: I hope so. Because you are on the guest list tonight. We are round the corner from the Bristol O2 in a pub and you are on the guest list?

Louise Tingay: I am on the guest list and it’s really lovely that he wanted to put me on his guest list to thank me for my working for him at WOMAD.

Nick Baker: Well come on, let’s go.

[SEGUE]

Nick Baker: Well we are early at the venue and some fans have already nabbed their places at the front of the queue.

A Fan: He’s not like the usual grime artists that rap about stabbing people and smoking weed; it’s mostly about just what he’s done in his life, in his past.

Nick Baker: He’s quite well known among deaf people, which seems weird.

A Fan: Yes. I didn’t know that.

Nick Baker: I saw him at WOMAD and when he’s on he has a British sign language interpreter.

A Fan: Really? That is really cool. That’s like a really good thing because it’s like broadening music for all types of people. I respect that a lot.

[Music]

Nick Baker: These interpreters can have a huge impact.

Nick Baker: Deaf rap fan, Mark Mayer.

Mark Mayer: My first experience of music with sign language was at Glastonbury Festival and for the first time ever I saw a whole different side of music. I cried because it was just such a powerful performance that I was getting from that sign language interpreter.

[Music]

Nick Baker: Okay. So Loyle Carner, poet or rapper first?

Loyle Carner: I guess I’m a rapper, I would say so. I mean, I’ve kind of been described as many things but I think, yes, fundamentally I was always a big fan of poets and rappers and so that together is kind of what I do I suppose.

Nick Baker: Loyle Carner and Louise, his interpreter, haven’t seen each other since they shared a stage at WOMAD and it turns out Louise has something to confess. It’s about a song performed by Loyle and also by someone who has always been very close to him.

Louise Tingay: When I was prepping, the one thing I was really worried about was that you were going to sing Sun of Jean, because every time I listened to your mum and her poem I wept.
Loyle Carner: Yes, yes, yes. “I had to carry a first aid kit, my band-aid boy I had my heart in my mouth wherever we went, he’d do backflips into the pool when he was tiny And the lifeguards would get all stressed out He was a proper Mowgli. He embraced everything.”

Loyle Carner: Yes that breaks my heart because I think... because we didn’t play it that day, did we?

Louise Tingay: No.

Loyle Carner: And the thing is as much as I understand...

Nick Baker: This is pretty exceptional, you know, a rap artist and an interpreter sitting in the same room mulling over their last gig. British sign language performance expert Marie Pascall says lots of artists are completely unaware of the struggle to make their music accessible to their deaf fans.

Marie Pascall: The biggest barriers we are facing is that even when we get the doors open we’ve got a huge mountain to climb. There’s so many layers to get through. The majority of the time the artist doesn’t even know there’s a sign language interpreter because we have to get through the promoters, the promoters are often very reluctant, we then have to get through the production management, the artist liaison. It never gets to the artist. A lot of the time they are surprised that there’s even an interpreter there.

Nick Baker: Now, therein may lie the reason why this essential role still remains niche work. Kate Labno interpreted for Eminem at Reading Festival last summer. A big step forward for deaf fans but Eminem’s people weren’t quite ready to let her stand on the stage with him.

[Music]

Nick Baker: But I wanted to get deep into the challenges of language and interpretation. Lots of deaf fans will know the lyrics because they will have read them online as subtitles to the video but interpreting them word for word, it’s possible.

Kate Labno: BSL is very literal. So there’s one line in a song and it’s ‘Say F-it before you kick the bucket’. Kick the bucket doesn’t exist in sign language; it’s die because we interpret meaning. So if I signed kicked the bucket, deaf people would go, ‘Where’s the bucket in this song?’ So you’ve got some deaf people here who are very big fans of Eminem and want the lyrics and some that want the meaning. There I signed ‘before you die’ but I mouthed ‘before you kick the bucket’.

Nick Baker: At once?

Kate Labno: Yes, at once. That’s another part of the challenge with Eminem.

[Music]

Nick Baker: Kate brought along a video of her interpretation of one of Eminem’s biggest songs, Lose Yourself.

[Music]

Nick Baker: You are signing from the feet to the top of your head. Your feet and legs are dancing, your shoulders and hips are dancing, your face is doing stuff and your arms [laughs].

Kate Labno: They are important too, yes.

Nick Baker: I’m going crazy.

Kate Labno: It’s an energetic job. You burn some calories up there.
Nick Baker: Back in his dressing room at the Bristol Academy, Loyle Carner has the rare opportunity to hear more about his interpreter’s challenges.

Louise Tingay: I’m going to tell Loyle which was the hardest one for me to really unpick and it’s such a brilliant line because there’s so much information in it and you say, ‘Cutting more lines than disabled kids up in Thorpe Park’.

Loyle Carner: Yes, I do, I do. Yes, a lot of my friends were caught up in difficult stuff when they were younger and so I guess cutting more lines is a drug reference for one but it’s also if you are disabled at Thorpe Park you get to cut in front of the line to get in front because you get like a pass.

Louise Tingay: There’s so much to unpick, so you can’t do it. And also in sign language if I was showing the drug reference, cutting more lines, that would be very different to jumping a queue, so you can’t do both and actually in the context of the song it’s the drug reference, so we as interpreters have to make judgements about which information we drop to retain the narrative.

Nick Baker: It’s great that so much thought goes into the interpreting but sad that there isn’t more of it. Marie Pascall of Performance Interpreting.

Marie Pascall: We don’t have a BSL Act in this country. Ireland have one, Scotland have one, England doesn’t. We are behind. And that means that although we have an Equalities Act, the Equalities Act is not robust enough. Is says they need to provide reasonable adjustments. And mini venues believe that providing a performance interpreter does not constitute a reasonable adjustment when in fact it does.

Daryl Jackson: It’s a bit like saying it’s unthinkable of having concerts where you would have the speakers off, wouldn’t it, and that’s the same concept as if a deaf person goes in and there’s just no signing there. It’s exactly that.

Nick Baker: Mmm. Never thought of that. Daryl Jackson’s point about the speakers being off for deaf people at music concerts could be applied to lots of performances, even to radio. Daryl and his colleague Marie asked me when Radio 4 would be available in deaf friendly form. Err, rap may have opened the door for that. Rap fan, Mark Mayer.

Mark Mayer: This is a beautiful language that’s very visual and it gives just a massive performance not only to the deaf and hard of hearing people but also to the wider audience. This is music in its purest form.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS: